

VZCZCXRO9302

RR RUEHBZ RUEHDU RUEHGI RUEHJO RUEHMA RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHKI #1102 3511529
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 171529Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0448
INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE
RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1322
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 2983
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE 0174

UNCLAS KINSHASA 001102

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR, RRU, IIP/G/AF, IIP/T/GIC, AF/C, AF/PDPA

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [OIIP](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CG](#)
SUBJECT: RADIO FRANCE SIGNAL REPORTEDLY TO BE REINSTATED

REF: Kinshasa 1044 and previous

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a recent meeting with representatives of a Congolese press freedom NGO, Minister of Media and Communications Lambert Mende assured the leaders of that organization that the signal of Radio France International (RFI) would be restored in early 2010. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) In response to the Congolese government's shutdown on July 26, 2009 of RFI's signal throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Western diplomats met on several occasions with Minister of Media and Communications Lambert Mende to protest this violation of press freedom and demand that the French radio network's signal be restored (reftel and previous). On December 15, 2009, PDO met with representatives from the press freedom group Journalists in Danger (JED) for a briefing on their annual report on freedom of the press in the DRC. During the discussion, Donat M'Baya and Tshivis Tshivuadi, JED's president and vice president respectively, stated that at a December 8 meeting with Mende, the minister promised that RFI's signal would be re-instated "by the new year." Mende said that French national director of international news operations Christine Ockrent would visit Kinshasa and meet with President Kabila before the end of the year. According to Mende, the meeting would result in a signed agreement -- the details of which have already been decided between the two parties. After months of negotiations, RFI and the GDRC have apparently reached a compromise that will allow RFI to begin broadcasting again. After informing them of this development, Mende told the JED representatives not to publicize the announcement, so as not to upstage President Kabila.

¶3. (SBU) According to the JED representatives, Mende also presented two conditions (which he claims RFI has agreed to) for the resumption of RFI's broadcast in the DRC: the French broadcaster must pay taxes and other fees for its local partner radio stations, and must establish a Kinshasa news bureau (headed by an RFI journalist other than controversial journalist Ghislain Dupont). (NOTE: Previously, Mende demanded that RFI fire Dupont as a condition for resumption of its broadcasts in the DRC. End note.) RFI's agreement to these demands would allow Mende to be seen as having won some concessions, and not just caving in to international pressure. The GDRC "is trying to find a solution," M'Baya told PDO, "because they know the RFI shutdown makes them look bad."

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Until the agreement is signed, there can be no guarantee that RFI's signal will be re-established. However, Mende's statements indicate that the GDRC appears ready to resolve this issue. Following pressure from Western diplomats (reftel), Mende apparently is stepping back from earlier positions. While the re-establishment of RFI's signal would be a welcome development, the fact that it was shut down in the first place, and that it remained silent for several months, demonstrates that the GDRC is not afraid

to test the resolve of the international community in its (the government's) effort to minimize criticism, particularly in sensitive areas such as alleged human rights abuses. While harassing the press is not helpful in the building of democratic institutions, the government's actions should come as no surprise in a country that has been ruled by tyrants for most of the 49 years it has existed as a country. End comment.

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